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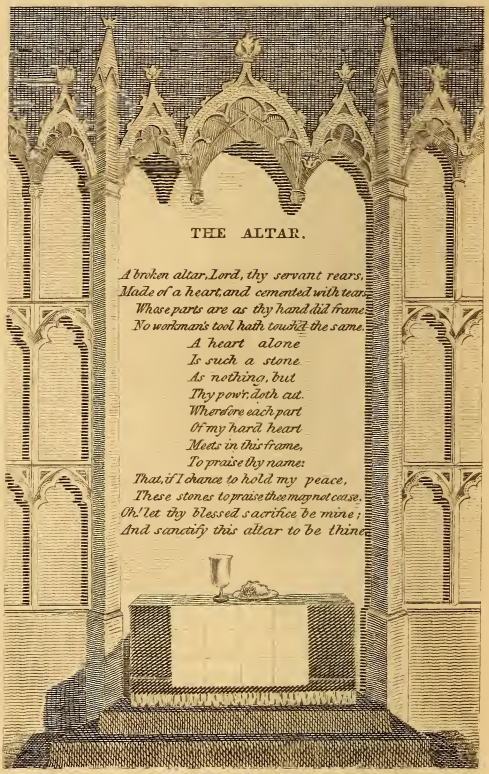
HISTORY

OF THE

CROSS OF CHRIST.



THE ALTAR.

A broken altar, Lord, thy servant rears,
Made of a heart, and cemented with tears;
Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;
No workman's tool hath touch'd the same.

A heart alone
Is such a stone
As nothing, but
Thy pow'r, doth cut.
Wherefore each part
Of my hard heart
Meets in this frame,
To praise thy name:

That, if I chance to hold my peace,
These stones to praise thee may not cease.
Oh! let thy blessed sacrifice be mine;
And sanctify this altar to be thine.

HISTORY

OF THE

CROSS OF CHRIST.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM R. ALGER.

"Crux Vera
Non in ligno, Sed in Signo,
Ducis
Victoria,
Crucis
Gloria,
Privatio vitae Donatio."

Dear Lord! who thine own cross to death did'st bear,
Teach us its spirit, and thy life, to share.

CAMBRIDGE AND BOSTON:
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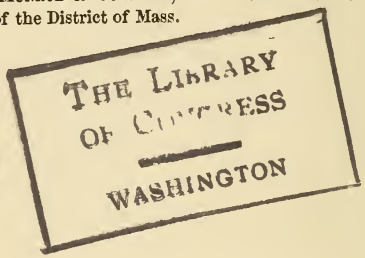

JOHN FORD,
PRINTER, CAMBRIDGEPORT, MASS.

TO

THE MOUNT PLEASANT

CONGREGATIONAL

SOCIETY,

THIS LITTLE WORK

IS

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

BY

THEIR PASTOR.

My God replied,
"Jesus once died
Thy soul to save
Then rose to heaven."
Die, then, doubt, sloth, impurity and pride;
With all your fearful, deadly brood, go hide
In sin's last grave.
Then rise, heart's love,
To live by truth
With Christ above
In endless youth;
And when death calls
And this frame falls,
My soul shall rise
Beyond the skies,
And being pardoned, crowned, by him,
Shall praise him with an endless hymn.

PREFACE.

The idea of this little book was suggested to the author by perusing "Cruciana," an interesting work, by John Holland, published in England in 1835. Some of the quotations, and some of the facts embodied in the following sketch, were derived from that source. But the plan, execution, uses of the present essay are, in most respects, so different from those of Mr. Holland's volume, that no further acknowledgment or reference to his work seems to be required. The hope of the author in presenting this humble production to the public, is that it may awaken Christian feelings in those who read it, by showing how the Cross of Christ justly appeals to the reason, the imagination, and the heart of a living believer. "Cruciana" is a collection of miscellaneous information and literature concerning the Cross. "Justi Lipsi De Cruce,"—a Latin book printed in 1598—is a literal account, with engravings, of the Cross, its various shapes, and its use as an instrument of torture in different countries and times. The present work gives the symbolic history of that now hallowed object—the

lessons taught by its fortunes and uses. This field the writer believes to have been hitherto unoccupied; and it seemed to him so capable, that he trusts a sufficient apology will be found in what he has written, for publishing it.

W. R. A.

Roxbury, March 29th, 1851.

HISTORY OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST.

"The preaching of the Cross."

[PAUL.

TRACING the history of the Cross will help us to see its moral meanings and feel its spiritual power. It was a significant token for ages before Christianity adopted and sanctified it. It was sometimes viewed in antiquity as the sign of a man standing with outstretched arms. More than one ancient nation honored it as a symbol of the Universe, on account of its pointing to the four quarters of the compass. The Druids were accustomed to consecrate to the object of their

worship the most majestic oak of the grove, which they stripped of all its limbs, except the two largest so left as to form a gigantic Cross towering in the mystic ring at high moon, with a meaning unknown to us. It is singular that the earliest use of the Cross made known to us, was a symbol of immortality. The *crux ansata* was thus employed in the temples and religious rites of the Egyptians. It was also used as a sacred emblem by some of the Hindoo sects, independently of the establishment of Christianity, as was discovered, to their great astonishment, by the first Christians who visited the East for missionary purposes.

Let this striking coincidence be re-

garded as an unintended yet profound symbol, prophetic of final union. The true destiny of all men is one; the genuine aim of all religions is one; the God towards whom all aspire is one; the Redeemer, all need to remove their sins and supply their wants, is one. The Orientals were farther advanced in thought and inward experience; the Christians were in closer connection with the external providence of God. The use of the Cross among the former, let it be supposed, then, was as the emblem of an abstract desire after God, and a speculative doctrine of the future life: among the latter, let us consider it as the corresponding emblem of an incarnate revelation of God, and a his-

toric reality of the resurrection. What those priestly contemplators intellectually discerned and hoped, Christians have sensibly realized, seen with their eyes, and handled with their hands; for the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among them, and they beheld his glory. And as the Holy Being who, uniting the human and the Divine in his own person, brought God down to men, and lifted men up to God, was "the Desire of all Nations," so shall he finally be acknowledged as the rightful Lord of all hearts, and have for "his inheritance the utmost bounds of the heathen." Then shall the mighty Family of the East, brought to the full truth, and kneeling before the ancient symbol

of their faith, the Cross, planted in the rising sun; and the great Family of the West, nurtured by the Gospel, and kneeling before the modern symbol of their faith, the Cross, planted in the setting sun — join around the earth in one swelling ascription of praise, through the common name of Christ, unto the infinite Father of them all.

Let us go back to the earthly days of our Saviour, and follow downwards the account of the Roman and Jewish cross. It was an instrument composed of two transverse pieces of wood, upon which the vilest capital criminals were nailed by their hands and feet to die, in expiation of their offences. Common offenders, who

were condemned to death, were executed in a less barbarous manner. Crucifixion was reserved for the most degraded outcasts and slaves, those guilty of the most aggravated and terrible crimes, — the very dregs of the time. Cicero, painting the illegal and foul deeds of Verres, the tyrant of Sicily, with the darkest colors of his rhetoric, charges him not so much with presuming to murder an innocent man, as with daring to *crucify* a Roman citizen. The cross, accordingly, was held in utter abhorence, as the badge of an executioner, significant of the expiring agonies of the worst of men, a token of ignominy, abomination, and loathing. It was used for this purpose, and regarded in

this manner, for several centuries among various nations. A host of wretched miscreants had perished on it. Many a poor victim, too, who deserved a better fate, had suffered on it. It had come to be generally considered as the very emblem of defeated crime, and disgraceful punishment: a synonyme for all that was at once powerless and execrable.

Such was its history until Jesus Christ died on it, and then how it was changed! In an instant, as it were, it became the most glorious instrument, the most resistless symbol that will ever be known. That such a Being should have died on it, in such a spirit, and for such a purpose — that the spotless image of God, from self-

sacrificing love, for the enforcement of divine truth, should have died on it — this completely changed its significance and its associations. The fanatic Jews, and enraged Romans — blinded murderers, not knowing what they did — reared a cross upon Calvary. It stood there, as many a one had stood before, sight of horror. But he who was about to die thereon, without a parallel, was "The Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of mankind." They transfixed his bleeding limbs, and "lifted" him "up," ignorant that he should thus be enabled to "Draw all men unto Him." Love of man, and trust of God, were blended in his features, and forgiveness fell from his lips, while, an ever-

memorable spectacle, he hung there dying. At last he raised his fainting head, and exclaimed, "It is finished." And immediately the dark and shameful cross was transfigured and irradiate, the blood-stained wood beamed with a glory that pales all the splendor of the world. It was henceforth to be the accredited symbol of God's love, and Christ's divinity, and man's redemption, and death's overthrow, and Heaven's immortal brightness.

Nothing can better illustrate the change wrought in the meaning and associations of the cross, and the power flung around it by the martyrdom of Jesus, than the intense enthusiasm that ran through all Christendom, when, in the fourth century, it was

reported that Helena, the mother of the reigning Emperor, having employed some laborers to dig at Golgotha, had found the very cross on which the Saviour suffered. It was publicly shown during the celebration of Easter; and an immense crowd of pious believers, attracted from every portion of the Christian world, stretching in thousands upon thousands, far almost as the eye could reach, when it was borne aloft, swayed to and fro in prayer, and thrilled with fear as they contemplated the awful wood.

The power of the cross comes, of course, from what it suggests, from its symbolic meaning. Its attraction is two-fold; derived first from the power of a natural sympathy with him

whose person, whose works, whose sufferings it typifies; and, secondly, from the power of the supernatural revelation whose sense and force there centre and culminate.

No one can become acquainted with Jesus, can know him as he was, without being filled with admiration for his godlike attributes, and penetrated with sympathy for him on account of his virtues, and painful sacrifice. The reason why so many persons remain unmoved by the picture of his character, and the story of his life, unredeemed by the power of his spirit, is simply that they never *knew* him. So unparalleled were his purity, tenderness, and self-denial; so altogether lovely was he in character;

so harmless, so sublimely beneficent was his career, that every heart must turn to him with spontaneous reverence, and yearn to yield him the tribute of a holy personal love. And then to think that *He*, that such a being, should have been so harshly treated, so cruelly murdered, while he endured all without a murmur, and spent his whole existence for nothing else but to bless others — this is what must draw forth the pitying and grateful tears of all time, and clothe the cross with a mighty power over human affections. That he who had the gentlest heart that ever throbbed in sympathy with mortal weal or woe, should have been so neglected, despised, spurned, and cast out — that

those feet which never wearied on errands of mercy, as he still went about doing good, and those hands which were laid in benediction on the heads of little children, which touched the eyes of the blind with sight, and raised the broken-hearted sinner with a brother's love and a Saviour's forgiveness, should have been nailed in agony to the accursed tree — that he who was the perfection of every virtue, without a taint of guile or the shadow of a sin, should have been made to die in such ignominy, and in such anguish; the last sight that met his eye, the mocking sneers of his foes; the last sound that murmured in his ear, the blasphemous jeers of the rabble, — all this rising in the

soul of the Christian, as he contemplates the cross, is what first gives that symbol its power. The cross is made touching and attractive, therefore, by a natural sympathy with the person of the beloved Jesus, who was willing to die upon it for us; and this power will never fade away until the human heart becomes a stone.

In the next place, the cross has power, as being the received emblem of God's last and highest revelation, the visible sign of his interest in man, the standing proof of his great love, the memorial of his redeeming purpose, the full personification of that infallible religion which came down from Heaven. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten

Son to die as a reconciling sacrifice, that men's hearts might be melted, that they might believe in the Father's love, and be assured of eternal life. That is the divine import of the crucifixion, and hence comes its chief attraction. It tells the poor benighted wanderers of earth, that beyond the visible expanse dwells a Being of infinite power and mercy, who loves them, and will save them, and bring them to his heavenly home; that he has sent a beloved son into the world, to declare this truth and make him fully known, to illustrate the aim of life by his example, demonstrate the divinity of his mission by miraculous works, and lift the curtain from immortality by a resurrection from the dead. It

assures man that he is not banished from God, nor isolated from the sympathies of the universe, nor doomed to perish in the grave; but that the Father is with him, that Heaven cares for earth and waits to welcome its redeemed ones to a deathless shore. Such is the story the cross of Christ tells to our poor, weary, afflicted humanity; and until all faith in it has died out from among men, its chosen symbol will not lose its power over the mind, and over the heart, of the world.

The cross is mighty, then, not alone through the power of all the noblest elements of humanity, and all the deepest interests of earth, intensified and gathered there; but also through

the pleading presence of God, and the anxious sympathy of Heaven, there embodied and made known. It was not alone the perfection of man, but also a direct manifestation of God, that hung and bled on Calvary; and not only the earth shuddered, but also the Heavens were opened, when he expired. God's own love, shown for the conversion of a rebellious race, was in that heart which was pierced by the soldier's spear. The chains which bind this world with mutual sympathies to another sphere, were illuminated, made visible, and never again to be forgotten, when Christ triumphed as he yielded.

One of the old painters has left a picture which shows a profound in-

sight into the meaning of that portentous hour, typifying the momentous truths that God has descended to man, that Heaven takes an interest in earth. The Saviour is fainting in death. His mother and two or three disciples are prostrate at the foot of the cross, in speechless woe. The mob reaches widely around, the various expressions of their up-turned visages visible in the glare of torches and the supernal light. But over this heart-rending scene of all horrors mingled in the gloom, streams a dazzling radiance from above. From the summit of the cross, far out through illimitable space, and along the open vistas of the clouds, throng the angels of God, — cherubim, rank

beyond rank, seraphim, choir above choir, crowding through all the sky. This host of heavenly spirits, their faces radiant with divine beauty and joy and triumph, are striking their harps to notes of praise, and joining in one exulting song of victory and thanksgiving, whose burden, rolling through the confines of creation, sounds on forevermore, — "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto God that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb that was slain." *Below* the cross, the earth was shrouded in darkness, and humanity, in tears, refused to be comforted; *above* it, the heavens were filled with unwonted splendor, and the glittering hosts were shouting for joy.

And now, looking upon the cross as a token charged with the accumulated power of the personal history of Christ, and with the whole power of the revealed religion, sent through him from God, we are prepared to understand how and why it was that Paul, and the other primitive believers, so readily accepted it as the sign of their faith, magnified it, and gloried in it. They but chimed in with what they saw to be the wondrous plan of salvation; namely, the overthrow of pride and selfishness by voluntary humiliation and self-sacrifice, in an example divinely set for all to follow. God might, had it so pleased him, have stretched his almighty arm from the central heavens, and

with bare-faced power, have swept all evil from the globe; but, having respect unto the freedom of the soul, he chose to send his Son to toil, and plead, and suffer, and die; he chose the foolish, weak, and base things of the world, to confound the wise, mighty, and honorable things—that no flesh should glory in his presence. The early Christians, realizing this, determined, lest the cross should be of none effect, to know nothing save Jesus Christ, and *him* crucified. Inspired by the astonishing fact that he who was in the form of God, condescended, and made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and humbled himself, and became obedient unto death,

even the death of the cross, they resolved to imitate him, and counted all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge thus given them. Seeing the wickedness and vanity of this world warring against the interests of eternity — the opposition of its whole spirit to the spirit and conditions of redemption — they boldly made their choice, and took their stand, exclaiming in the front of all pagan haughtiness, "God forbid that we should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world." And so the cross soon grew emblematic of all Christianity, and its assumption became the badge of discipleship. "Henceforth," they said,

"let no man trouble us, for we bear in our bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus" — the prints of that crucifixion whereby we are dead unto sin, the flesh and this world, and alive unto righteousness, God and immortality. Hitherto the image of the cross had only been seen, lowering upon Golgotha, the place of a skull, and planted in Aceldama, a field of blood. But then, carved from the richest materials, ornamented with gems and gold, it became a conspicuous object in the private dwellings of all Christian believers, was erected in their places of worship, was worn next their breasts, and often, with a pious fervor of which we have but too little experience, pressed to their lips. Wherever

in the known world a Christian set foot, there the cross was carried. Wherever the name of Christ was heard, or "preaching was attempted, the speaker held the crucifix in his hand, and enforced the truth of his arguments by pointing to the wounds, and appealing to the bleeding image." The ignominious symbol of a dying felon gradually extended its conquests, transformed its meaning, and was covered with resplendence and power. Where was it not carried, by devoted disciples and heroic missionaries, as the all-conquering token of what is holiest, strongest, and dearest; even as the token of a pardoning God, a sacrificed Redeemer, a triumphant resurrection, and an unend-

ing Heaven! Ethiopia saw it, and stretched out her hands to God. It was borne, with proselyting speech, among the pagan swarms of China and India. It overthrew the blood-stained altars of Odin and Thor, and subdued the fierce hordes of Europe to its benignant sway. The first act of the discoverer of America upon landing, was to plant it on the shore, and consecrate the continent to the name and faith of Him who breathed out his life upon it. The rude Greenlanders were melted to tears by its pathos; and the dwellers of the isles of the sea learned to recognize its significence, and adore. Thus the infamy of the cross was wiped away, and the foolishness of preaching pre-

vailed, till that which once the world most despised, by the consummate glory of Christ grew most illustrious, signed the beggar's forehead, mounted crown and throne, blazed upon the flags of nations, tipped the domes of mighty cathedrals, adorned the splendid mausoleums of kings, and hallowed the peasant's funeral turf.

One of the most unfortunate mistakes men have made, is the persevering attempt to construct a theology, instead of deduce a religion, from the cross. It has been regarded as the exponent of abstract dogmas, the emblem of a cold and awful system of avenging justice, rather than as the embodiment of divine feelings, the sign of a regenerative, all-forgiv-

ing goodness. The first evil of the arbitrary interpretation of the cross has been the birth of intolerance and persecution. Men, supposing the honor of God, and the salvation of the soul, to depend on the belief of a certain mysterious, appalling theory of the crucifixion, have been led to hate, and excommunicate, pursue with fire and sword, all who rejected that view. Had they regarded the cross, not as a symbol of law, appealing to the intellect, interpreting the necessities of God's government; but as a symbol of pity, of melting charity, appealing to the heart, revealing the merciful kindness of God's free grace, it would have softened the asperity of hostile opinions, and joined

all souls in the unity of one spirit. Think not upon the cross as the fearful embodiment of a theology, but contemplate it as the bright symbol of a religion. For as Moses lifted up the fiery serpent in the wilderness that all who had been bitten by the scorpions might look on it and live, so Jesus was lifted upon the cross that whosoever receives him as the Son of God, and cherishes his spirit, may be assured of eternal life. Whosoever fills his heart with the feeling that filled the heart of the Saviour, that radiates from the cross, has passed from death unto life; no matter what his special theological tenets are, he has acquired all that is requisite for the perfect redemption of the world.

Another evil which has resulted from making the death of Christ teach an arbitrary scheme of theology, instead of enforce a practical lesson of sympathy and duty, is the removing of the cross from contact with personal conscience and effort. The fancies of men have pictured it as the instrument of a purchased deliverance, in which they can do nothing but submit to a predestined decree. They have described its foot as piercing the depths of hell, when the infinite victim died, shaking the throne of Satan to its overthrow and rescuing half his captives, while its summit rose above the skies and cast redoubled radiance over the shining ranks of heaven. According to this scheme,

those who are of the elect are safe, the price has been paid, they have only to rejoice and give thanks; those who are of the reprobate are unalterably doomed, the sentence has been fixed from eternity by an absolute fate, they can only submit in passive despair to their terrific doom. We shudder at such a theory. We protest against all such views as unchristian. We warn men against them as unwarranted in Scripture, unfounded in fact, and bad in influence. With the earnestness of an intense conviction, we maintain that the core of the Gospel is something very different, is no abstract dogma at all, but is a living principle of faith in God, and a glowing sentiment of good will to men. In

a single word, we believe that, according to the design of God, the intention of Christ, and the nature of the case, the legitimate object and teaching of the Cross is a lesson of self-immolating, all-conquering love. Its real and practical meaning is that pervading, purifying, inspiring spirit of goodness which leads one to deny himself, keep the commandments, love God and man with the whole soul, and go about doing good, willingly offering up the life a sacrifice for the advancement of the kingdom of heaven on earth. This is the essence and glory of Christianity. The urgent proclamation of this to men is the true "preaching of the cross." The prevalence of this is all the Gospel proposes, or the world

needs. This is the foolishness of God which the Apostle affirms is wiser than men; and this is the weakness of God which he says is stronger than men.

The cross does not *unveil* a magical theory, but *emphasizes*, with miraculous sanctions and motives, the rational truth. It demands not a barren belief, but a fruitful love. By this view it will be seen the crucifixion has a personal office to fulfil, in awakening the consciousness and renewing the character of every disciple through his own voluntary attention and effort. The Saviour willingly submitted to that cruel death, with forgiveness and benediction on his lips, to exemplify the character of the Father, to show the awful nature and depth of the

wickedness which could perpetrate so unutterable an outrage, and to exert a moral power on the human heart which would melt down its hardness, purge away its impurities, fill it with admiration and gratitude, and lift it into the kingdom of divine emotions and immortal ideas. We are to cooperate with the Holy Spirit by using means to effect these results. The proper aims and influences of our Saviour's sufferings and death combine to secure one end; that is, to produce in the soul of the disciple the spirit of the master, the spirit of humility, self-denial, disinterested piety and philanthropy. It is therefore the duty of every individual to take his stand in hallowed imagination at the foot of

the Cross, in struggling penitence, and meditation, and prayer, until he feels and is redeemed by its power, until he is consecrated to the obedience of righteousness, caught up by the love of God, penetrated with sympathy for the great brotherhood of forlorn and sighing humanity. While the soul of man is oppressed with injustice, defiled with unclean desires, deformed and tormented by haughtiness, envy, cruelty—the Cross of Christ is made of none effect. In vain did his Saviour bleed for him. He may boast of the soundness of his faith, observe the ceremonies, and parade the outward symbols of religion, but all is hollow and worthless so long as

"The breast-worn cross betrays no cross below."

Ah! who can stand at the foot of the cross and gaze on the face of the Son of Man, and remember his toiling outcast and smitten life, and hear the faint accents of his voice, and see him die, without feeling the inconsistency of selfishness, pride and coldness, with a Christian's profession, without feeling the duties of earth and the claims of heaven profoundly impressed upon his conscience. The poverty, loneliness, sacrifice, love and spirituality of the Cross of Christ rebuke and fling dimness and shame on the arrogant luxuries and honors of the pampered children of this world, and urge upon them the lowliest spirit and the loftiest aim. And there have been those who have learned that lesson well and prac-

tised it to the last. There passes before the mind a sainted multitude of those who have taken up the cross, and in its full spirit pressed on in the steps of their great example, regardless of the shame, the danger, and the toil, despising the pleasures and prizes of the world, keeping their consciences pure, their whole lives consecrated to the glory of Him who was crucified, ministering to the poor, the loathed, and the sick, comforting the mourner's heart, breathing the words of salvation in the ear of the dying, preaching the religion of redemption in foreign lands among savage people, expiring with the cross in their hands and the name of Christ on their lips, and borne into heaven, their transfiguration garments already

on. The genuine "preaching of the cross" is that which tends to produce such a result. Let us not deceive ourselves then with arbitrary creeds, not remain coldly afar off, but draw near and be melted with sorrow and fired with resolve. Let us, humbly and devoutly kneeling there, vow never to forsake the heavenward path in which the Cross leads its followers to the bosom of their Master, who awaits their emancipated coming at the right hand of God.

The present meaning, associations, honors of the Cross, contrasted with its ancient ignominious uses, and with the profound loathing in which it was held—the startling and total change herein implied—affords an interesting

and powerful argument for the historical genuineness and authenticity of Christianity. Go, in imagination, from the present position of that potent sign, step by step, along the backward path of its diminishing radiance and increasing disgrace, and you must come at last to a summit of Calvary and a death of Christ, to a place and an hour and an event where and when a transfiguring power was thrown about it, causing it to shine with growing lustre and wield an accumulating influence thenceforwards till now. The phenomena of the history of the Cross are inexplicable, save upon the supposition that Jesus, a being of superhuman virtues and authority, really suffered, as the Records

declare. "What," pertinently observes the ingenious writer to whom we owe this thought; "what must take place before we could see, without a shudder, and with emotions of reverence, the gallows on the spires of our churches, the gallows in our parlors, the gallows an ornament on our persons, the gallows wrought in all our most beautiful and sacred works of art?" To effect a revolution of historic association, and of æsthetic taste, so immense, so incredible, so nearly inconceivable, a miracle would be required. Every time we see the Cross, we know that the historic events related in the Gospels actually occurred.

We next pass to notice some of the symbolic uses made of the Cross at

various times. Omitting those superstitious perversions, and legends, which are merely interesting to a useless curiosity, and with which it would be easy to fill volumes, we shall confine our attention to those particulars which have spiritual power and a practical moral in them.

With deep significance and a beautiful propriety, the use of the Cross in baptism was early introduced into the Church. Children were brought to the font; the minister, after a solemn prayer, crossed them with the holy water, saying, "Receive the sign of the Cross in thy forehead, in token that thou shalt not be ashamed to confess thy faith in Christ crucified." Thus, in their innocence, in the morn-

ing of life, were they by right dedicated to God, consecrated through baptism into the faith of Christ, in promise that they should follow his example on earth and join his triumph in heaven. They were baptised and sealed with the Cross in token that they were *his*. Beautiful emblem! God grant all our children may ever be his, and keep his Cross in sight. Whenever one is baptised in his spotless purity, a worthy offering to him who was himself spotless, oh! let it be hoped he will always be guided by the unconscious vow, and never forfeit that Saviour's protecting love!

Memorial Crosses came to be built on the site of a martyrdom, a remarkable conversion, an important

battle, or other great event. They were frequently vast structures, constituting the finest specimens of architecture extant. A few of them are still standing. One of the very oldest Christian monuments in England is a stupendous Cross, cut in the steep side of a high hill of chalk. It is a hundred feet in height, seventy feet in width, and the trench is sunk in the chalk several feet in depth. This gigantic white Cross is visible at a distance of more than thirty miles, carrying the thoughts of all who recognize its form back, over the intervening centuries, to a Cross in the outskirts of Jerusalem, and to one dying there, the just for the unjust. Many public Crosses, and cruciform buildings, were

also erected near the markets, and other much frequented places of business, in order, as an old writer says, "to excite open homage for the religion of Christ crucified, and to inspire men with a sense of morality and piety amidst the ordinary transactions of life." If this were now done everywhere, it could not but be a good thing. Let the Cross meet the man of the world in the midst of his business, face him at every turn, reminding him of his Saviour's life of self-denial and death of shame, reminding him of his God's requirement of him, that he should 'deal justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly before heaven.' It would be a holy influence not unneeded by many a tempted

man in many a hurrying and perilous hour.

It seems to us an altogether harmless, nay, a most touching and useful custom — the habit so prevalent in the middle ages — of erecting crosses and open chapels by the way side, as it were inviting the passer-by and the stranger to remember their Saviour, not to neglect their devotions, but pause and kneel in confession, and lift up the humble voice of petition and praise to God.

"Eugenio marked, when journeying far from home—
A pilgrim through Italia's classic land,
On Lithuanian or Iberian strand,
Where'er old Europe bows to papal Rome—
How oft the Cross near some lone chapel stood,
Beside the fount, or in the public way,
That whoso list might there kneel down and pray
To him, once crucified, who shed his blood
For all mankind."

The ever-open church, the inviting altar, the sacred silence only broken by the sweet pensive music, allure many a soul to prayer, many a thought to Jesus, and many a desire to heaven.

There was a time when it was the common custom for helpless mendicants to take their station at the foot of crosses set up by the roadside, near churches, markets, and other frequented places, and there beg for relief in the name of Christ. And doubtless many an iron-handed knight, many a proud baron, his heart softened by the sad and sweet memories of him who suffered and died for all, was penetrated with pitying charity for the poor broken members of humanity who besought his aid, and liberally gave

to them with a tear and a blessing. Then was the cross of Christ put to a worthy use, its true spirit and power felt. And is it too fanciful to think that often, under such circumstances, the divine voice, which centuries before had spoken amid the fields of Judea, was again heard whispering in approving accents to their souls, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

In some Christian countries, for a long time, public crosses were endowed with privilege of sanctuary. Any condemned criminal, escaped prisoner, or person pursued by his enemies, who should fly to a cross, was to be left in peace, as if he had hold of the horns

of the altar, revenge and justice were compelled to spare him, unless the church herself laid hands on him. In those lawless and bloody times, such refuge was a merciful and fortunate provision, often improved by the innocent, the persecuted, the defenceless. How striking and pleasant is the emblem this fact affords! Now as then, though in a different sense, the foot of the cross is a sanctuary and a refuge — from the cares of the world, from the enemies of the soul. He who flies to it and prostrates himself there in faith and earnest prayer, will find pity and pardon, and divine protection; find peace from the fever and turmoil of his passions, and hear the benignant representative of the Father still ex-

claiming with unwearied tenderness, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." With what figurative truth and beauty Bunyan, having pictured his heavy-laden pilgrim toiling and struggling wearily through a thousand difficulties and dangers, shows us how the intolerable burden spontaneously rolled from his back and disappeared forever, the moment he reached the foot of the cross.

Almost from the commencement of Christian history we find that those to whom the world had lost its charm, the disappointed, the repentant, the bereaved, the broken-hearted, hermits, and those pious men and women who retired from the gay vanities of life to

the secluded cells of the monastery, were wont to soothe their aching hearts, kindle their devotions, and draw nigh to God and eternity, by contemplating the cross bearing an image of the dying Christ. Up and down the darkened isles, while strains of solemn music stole through the deserted silence and floated in plaintive cadences towards purer regions, sadly paced the guilty, with self-denial and prayer, and with many bitter tears, to wash away the memory of their sins. A death's head and a crucifix composed a chief part of the furniture of each private room. They glanced at that dread monitor, and all worldly thoughts and fleshly lusts fled away. They gazed upon this sad

spectacle till their hearts yearned and their tears flowed in remembrance of him who did so much for them, till the absorbing love of God and the glorious hope of heaven filled the desires of their souls. Well would it be for *us*, in these modern days, in a degree to do likewise. Sometimes to turn away from the luring toils of earth, and its deceitful pleasures, leave the dusty arena of worldly rivalry and ambition, and retreat to some place of lonely devotion; there to repent and pray, and solemnly meditate on all the associations and duties and promises that gather around the name and the cross of Christ. There to think of the certainty of death, the offered redemption of the Gospel, the

open arms of the prodigal's God, the immense realities of an unknown eternity. Ah! well would it be for most of us to dwell less in the world, and more with the cross. An hour comes when we shall think so.

It early became a custom with Christians to hold the cross over the dying, that the last object they saw might assure them both of a future life and of acceptance with God; and many a weary soul has gently passed away in the supporting trust thus inspired. "Hold the cross before me that I may see it in dying," said Joan of Arc when cruelly burnt at the stake; and the last word heard through the flames was, "Jesus." In the lone and awful crisis when the present was

closing and the future unfolding, the proud and costly things of the world were as dust and mockery, and the soul was absorbed in the cross, in the priceless symbol of salvation. The rich man turned from his treasures, the voluptuary from his indulgence, the statesman from his plots and fame, the king from his royal shows, the warrior from his arms and his enemy, in the solemn passage of the soul, and, clasping the cross to the pallid lips and the stiffening bosom, gasped a prayer of penitence and trust, and died.

"The sword had conquered kings,
And the spear through realms had passed,
But the cross alone of all seen things
Could avail them at the last."

It was not uncommon in former

ages, when the hour of dissolution approached, to scatter on the floor a quantity of ashes in the form of a cross upon which straw or sackcloth was laid as a bed for the dying person. Three monarchs of France, and one of England, expired upon such a bed, "yielding up the ghost with their arms composed in the shape of the cross." Solemn scene! which, while it speaks of the ghastly king who preaches in all ears, 'dust to dust,' also reminds us of a mightier than he, who hath snatched away his sting and robbed him of victory. The unfortunate Mary, Queen of Scots, just before she placed her head upon the block, having kissed the crucifix, fixed her eyes upon it and prayed in these

touching words: "Even as thy armes, O Jesus, was spredd here upon the crosse, so receive me into thy armes of mercy, and forgive me all my sinnes."

In this manner the cross sustained the faith of the dying as they sank down into the shadow of the dark valley; and then it was planted above their graves to bid the mourners be of good cheer, remembering their resurrection in a better world. One of the most significant and affecting sights in our modern burial grounds is the constantly recurring sight of the cross, surmounting alike the gilded tomb and the nameless hillock; a fond memento of what has been, a cheering prophecy of what is to be. The crosses thus set up over the dead

were called mortuary crosses. Two of them, made of solid gold, adorned with precious stones, and weighing a hundred and fifty pounds each, were placed upon the supposed sepulchres of Peter and Paul — emphatically contrasting their posthumous honors with their living poverty, toil, and deserted martyrdom. In the defiles of the Alps, and among the mountain passes of Spain and South America, the traveller encounters thousands of these rude crosses, each one commemorating the spot where some poor wayfarer has perished, either by accident, or from the bandit's knife. As he passes by these frail mementoes of sudden mishap, or of murderous wrath, he is expected to breathe a silent

prayer in the name of Christ for the hapless victim whose fate overtook him there.

It would leave too prominent a defect in this sketch of the history of the Cross, if we did not allude to its public adoption among the belligerent nations of Christendom, its emblazonry upon the standards and weapons of war. In the beginning of the fourth century, when Christianity, not yet acknowledged by any secular authority, was struggling with a precarious existence, Constantine, hesitating whether to proclaim allegiance to the many gods of the old religion or to the one God of the new, marched at the head of a large army against Maxentius. All was uncertainty and

hazard before his path, and all was indecision and anxiety within his soul. Suddenly, as it is related, there appeared before him in the mid-heaven a beaming cross bearing the inscription, "Conquer by this." He said the Saviour told him in a dream the ensuing night, to lift the figure of that cross and its motto upon his banners, and it should lead the way to invariable victory. It was done. The first unhappy union of Church and State was sealed and the faith of the despised Gallilean, who had not where to lay his head, began to be courted by princes, began to be installed in palaces. The publication of this vision and command, we must suppose, was either the result of a deep stroke of

policy or the deception of a heated fancy on the part of the emperor. The plan, however, was crowned with visible success; but as they marched beneath the mystic Labarum to successive triumphs, they trampled under their feet at every step, violated with every blow, and insulted with every shout, the person, spirit, cross, and commandments of him their lips called Lord. For that meek sufferer, abjuring all violence, refused to pray to his Father for twelve legions of angels, who, in an instant, would have gladly stooped from heaven with swords of fire to sweep away his foes — but he refused.

Centuries after the bones of Constantine had crumbled to dust, the

example he had thus set was followed on a stupendous scale in the Crusades, or Holy Wars, falsely so called. Europe shook beneath the tread of warriors mustering to the sign of the Crucified hoisted on their standards. As they marched towards Palestine to fight the Saracens, each soldier bore a red cross broidered on his shoulder. The most frightful barbarities and carnage ensued, and continued year after year. These horrible scenes were enacted in the very name, and under the shelter of the cross, of him who said, "My kingdom is not of this world; if it were, then would my servants fight." Among these perversions of the symbol of the religion of the prince of peace, the device on

the fearful banner of the Spanish Inquisition is worthy of notice. It was a knotty cross, with an olive branch on one side, and a dagger on the other. In the modern wars of nominal Christendom, the sacred cross had been frequently seen reared on both sides at once, and the banners that bore it bathed in each other's blood by the worshippers of a common Saviour. The wickedness of man, not content with *once* slaughtering the great High Priest, must keep the cross freshly stained with his divine blood renewedly shed!

"Alas that Christians should have e'er unfurled
This glorious sign, save as betokening peace,
That where it flew, there war and strife should cease
Till Christ's pacific empire filled the world!
But ah, beneath this banner hath been hurled

Hell's worst artillery, death's most cruel darts:
Revenge and rage have played their murderous parts
On battle gun-ships where the smoke up-curled
Its odious shadow and foul stain to cast
O'er the crossed flags that floated from the mast.
Oh, when shall come the blest, long-looked for time,
When, where this ensign floats on land or sea,
There, Jesus! shall thy Gospel reign sublime,
And all who own thy cross shall worship thee!"

Among the former habits of the warlike clans of Scotland was a wild picturesque custom, in case of invasion, or other national crisis, to transmit a Fiery Cross, blazing from its three upper points, over the hills and glens, from tribe to tribe. With incredible swiftness the country was awakened and united to repel the danger. So, we devoutly trust, in some future age a time shall come when the thrilling sign of the cross, in its true meaning

and power, passed from disciple to disciple, and from land to land, shall arouse the world to roll back the aggression of evil, and fulfil the requisitions of universal duty, to destroy the wretched hosts of wrong, and unite mankind in one faithful and happy band of brothers. God grant the help of his Spirit to the prayers and labors of good men to establish his kingdom on earth; and to that end let the Cross of Christ be borne aloft, once more, and for the last time, as the rallying standard of a *nobler crusade,* which shall summon all righteous and devout souls, not to the deliverance of an empty and supposititious sepulchre, by barbarous force, but to the redemption of the living and

bleeding body itself of our Lord, by the peaceful conquests of truth and virtue over error and sin, of piety and happiness over unbelief and misery, of brotherhood, equality and freedom, over hatred, pride and slavery, of heavenly harmony over infernal discord, and of a glorious immortality over death.

In tracing down the lineal history of the Cross, we must notice that its fate in Japan forms a dark episode, and emphasizes an important moral. The early labors of the Jesuit missionaries in that flourishing and populous empire were attended by remarkable success. With proverbial cunning adapting the externals of their system closely to those of the pre-

vailing religion of the land, they made converts by thousands through the astonishing wisdom, intrepidity, indomitable energy, self-sacrifice and zeal they displayed. Having risen to great consideration and influence, they began to take part in political affairs, and finally united in a resolute attempt to possess themselves of the government of the country, which they very nearly succeeded in doing. The unconverted portion of the Japanese, aroused by this apparent treachery and incipient effort to wrest all their rights from them, rose upon the missionaries and their adherents, slew great numbers of them and banished the rest. Since that time the Buddhists of Japan have looked upon

every sign of Christianity, especially upon the Cross, with inveterate hate and undissembled horror. Annually they trample that object beneath their feet with rage and scorn in the temples and in the streets. Its sign is stamped on the quay of the only port Christians are allowed to enter, where every one who lands steps upon it. That empire probably will be the last in the world to bow to the sceptre of Jesus. When Christian missionaries use sophistry, concealment and deceit, engage in treasonous plots, employ violence to secure their ends, how much more, in the long run, they lose than they can gain! How painful it is to think of the causes of the present fate and prospects of the Cross in

that crowded island, so blessed and choice with beauties in clime and soil, so benighted and bigoted in creed and policy!

One of the most frequent and striking uses the cross was formerly put to, was the neutralizing of spells, the casting out of evil spirits, and the working of other kindred magical effects. It was supposed that before the sign of the Cross all wicked charms were instantly reversed, all demons exorcised, all the wiles of hell baffled, and that the devil himself, reminded thereby of his fatal overthrow on Calvary, fled. The old Christian writers are full of miracles wrought by the simple making of this sign. Many of these legends are as beautiful as they

are marvellous; others are ludicrous, or coarse, or terriffic. It is remarkable, how every superstitious belief or custom is underlaid and informed, as it was probably originated, by a profound spiritual verity and moral. In the present instance the miraculous efficacy of the sign of the cross in vanquishing infernal powers, should be to us a symbol of the power of truth and love over evil — of faith and piety over the sorrows of the flesh and the temptations of the world. Let the token of purity be seen, and lust cowers and hides itself: before the manifest token of forgiveness and love how quickly anger and hatred fly! At the sign of truth and goodness error and sin disappear. The

sign of the cross banishes Satan. And though we trust not the letter of the tale, we are awed by the sublimity of the doctrine which looks yet to see that sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and on a scale so vast that it shall be visible to the whole universe when the stars are falling, and the elements melting, and Death and Hell with all their victims shall gaze on it and on Him whom they pierced, and shall flee away, and no place be found for them.

"Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews." When Pilate wrote this inscription, and, saying, "What I have written I have written," ordered it to be placed on the cross of Christ over his head, he little dreamed it would

one day be repeated through the world, not as mockery, but as loyalty. But so it is, and the fact preaches more loudly than thunders of the folly and madness of opposing the intentions of God, the cause of truth and man. The most astonishing and inspiring page in the annals of time, is the page which recounts the triumphs of this instrument, once the symbol of all that is ignominious, now of all that is divine and enduring. Among the mountains of Auvergne stands an altar of heathen worship, a Druid rocking stone overgrown with moss and age, surmounted by a rude Cross, probably a thousand years old. No traveller passes it without emotion and thought. It is at once a memo-

rial of the past conquests of the religion of Christ crucified over the pagan faiths, and a prophecy of its future reign without a rival. A still more emphatic emblem of the destined universality of the empire of Christianity was afforded by the sceptre of Theodosius. It was a globe crowned by a cross, meant to represent the earth subdued to the faith of Christ. The same symbol, we believe, is always placed in the hand of a monarch of Great Britain at his coronation, and was held by the present Queen during that cremony. But not only has the Cross climbed to the tops of altars, the domes of temples, the spires of churches, to proclaim its triumph. It has also ascended into the sky, and there, as

"Of man's redemption autograph supreme,
Is fitly charactered by stars in heaven."

In the southern firmament is a well known constellation, composed of five large stars located in a cruciform shape, called "The Cross of the South." From that splendid spot in the heavens it looks down upon the earth and preaches the resurrection and deification of Christ and of the cause for which he gave his life. There the *sign* of the Son of Man is seen in heaven. And far beyond it Jesus himself lives, and reigns, and invites his followers to come unto him. In Dante's ascent through the successive spheres of Paradise, in the fifth heaven he saw the souls of those who had gloriously died for the faith, ranged in the sign of a

cross, athwart which, spirits, like scintillating lights, met and passed to the sound of a melodious hymn. The religious imagination here finds still another application of the words, "The sign of the Son of Man shall appear in heaven."

A few words more must bring these feeble illustrations of a vast, solemn, and gladdening theme to a close. Originally, the prominent aspect of the cross was its inexpressible cruelty and injustice. It was the most appalling tragedy ever enacted amidst the darkened heavens and the shuddering earth by the unfeeling sin of man. And yet what good, what unbounded and eternal good, has flowed from it! It is the greatest illustration given by

history of the marvellous providence of God, how it educes good from evil, and converts even the wrath of man to praise. It was horror, agony, and fear a few moments; it is blessing, power, and sanctification forever. A worthy treatise, anything like an adequate portrayal of the effects of the *crucifixion*, is yet to be written. The influence of the sacrifice of Jesus in drawing attention to his religion and aiding in its diffusion; its influence in softening, purifying, and strengthening the sympathies of the human heart; its influence in awakening, rectifying, enthroning the moral conscience; its influence in quickening the spiritual aspirations and loves of the soul, creating true piety; its

resulting influence in reforming, refining, advancing civilization, and in other respects, have effected results which otherwise, in all human probability would not have been secured, and which, in value and amount are well nigh incalculable. The actual good effects traceable specifically to the crucifixion of Christ, infinitely outweigh all the evil connected with it. In its revealed meaning and power, it has conferred upon unnumbered thousands as much comfort and joy as it originally inflicted sorrow and pain upon one. The bearing of his own cross by the Saviour as our example, has consoled and inspired millions to bear their crosses with a peaceful joy, a divine resignation, an all suffering

faith and love towards God, and an undoubting hope of heaven, which they would not have known were it not written, "And they took Jesus and led him away; and he, bearing his cross, went forth." And who will undertake to estimate the power, the softening, spiritualizing power, that has gone forth, and will go forth more and more through all coming ages, from the Prayer of the Cross. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Poor spurned outcast, unpitied victim of injustice, sorrowful and weary sufferer, go

> "Weigh thy grief with the cross
> Of Christ, and see which is the heavier."

If the Cross of Christ could be obliterated from the history of the world

as if the crucifixion had never been, the most blessed and powerful influence ever exerted upon the heart of humanity would be destroyed. The history of the Cross teaches us, as no other history can teach, that God, the Father, orders and overrules all things, making light follow darkness, good spring out of evil, Christendom come from the Crucifixion.

The members of the Roman Catholic Church have always cherished, sanctified and revered the Cross almost to idolatry. They have used it as a spiritual symbol and power in a thousand ways, frequently with exceeding beauty, solemn majesty, irresistible pathos and the best effects. The whole history of their Church,

exterior and interior, gathers around it. Inexpressible associations cling about it; volumes of legends are connected with it. It has attended the travels, prominently marked the rites and crowned the altars of all their missionaries. It has gleamed like a ray from heaven before the eyes of their dying. It is carried, costly enough to ransom empires, before the Pope in gorgeous processions. It is placed, rude and humble and unattractive to the senses, in lonely cells where it awakens thrills of awe and delight in the bosoms of poor monks.

In the far-off isle of San Shan sleep the ashes of Francis Xavier, and his simple but magnificent epitaph is crowned by a humble cross, to which

pilgrimages are made, and where irrepressible tears are shed. On the banks of the Penobscot and of the Mississippi, in Florida and Newfoundland, in Mexico and at the Cape of Good Hope, amid the icy wastes of Scythia, on the balmy islands of the tropical ocean, and in the central recesses of China, the pathetic lineaments of the Cross tell the traveller that there reposes some martyred brother of the Society of Jesus. The orphan, the widow, the sick and afflicted, the beggar, the wretched outcast and sinner have found consolation, strength and peace in it, when there was no other comfort for them. Wordsworth speaks of its effect upon him when displayed in the annual ceremonies of the Church.

"Mine ear has rung, my spirit sunk subdued,
Sharing the strong emotion of the crowd,
When each pale brow to dread hosannas bowed,
While clouds of incense mounting, veiled the rood
That glimmered like a pine-tree dimly viewed
Through Alpine vapors. Such appalling rite
Our Church prepares not, trusting to the might
Of simple truth with grace divine imbued;
Yet will we not conceal the precious Cross,
Like men ashamed: the Sun, with his first smile
Shall greet that symbol crowning the low pile:
And the fresh air of incense-breathing morn
Shall wooingly embrace it; and green moss
Creep round its arms through centuries unborn."

Though it may be true that the Catholics have abused the Cross by gross superstitions, it must be confessed in their hands it is clothed with an affecting power which, in different ways, is calculated to touch the deepest springs of devotion, melt the hard heart, and animate the spir-

itual mind. Protestants, in their revulsion, went altogether too far, threw away some of the tenderest, most efficacious and hallowed methods of Christian influence. Since we, therefore, unimaginative, unspiritual descendants of the Puritans, have not these outward incitements, and are not likely, in our hard and literal worldliness to adopt them, let us deeply stamp in our souls, and carry there, the *sign* of the Cross, an ever-present memento, pleading with us to be mindful of the claims of Him who loved us and gave himself for us that we might be reconciled to God. Let his spiritual image be formed in us; his truth and love, his self-sacrifice and heavenly-mindedness; then will the

bearing of his cross be our pride, and perseverance in his service be its own exceeding great reward.

As a Christian traveller was roaming one morning among the valleys of the Alps, he saw, planted upon a frowning cliff, just above him, a humble cross, around which Nature had, with the most touching beauty and significance, twined a blooming cluster of forget-me-nots. At that moment the ascending sun sent its beams full upon the spot. The effect was singularly striking—the dark wood, the grey rock, the green vine, the painted flowers, all bathed in the rich golden light. He knelt down and poured out his soul in communion with God and heaven. The scene before him seem-

ed to say with audible voice, as if Jesus himself were saying, "Forget me not, forget not me who suffered and died for you; remember and love me, as I have remembered and loved you." O, who would not spontaneously reply to such an appeal, "Dear Saviour, never will I forget thee; I will remember thee, love thee, obey thee, and pray that thou wilt accept me, forgiving my unworthiness!" The cross of Christ wreathed with forget-me-nots! Let such an affecting symbol be set up in the hearted memory of every one who hopes hereafter to meet him. "He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." Christian, bear thy cross in a patient, cheerful spirit of

faith and love, and it shall grow lighter and lighter till it bears thee—bears thee up to heaven, where, instead of it, Christ shall give thee a crown.

" O glorious Cross ! Eternity and Time
Meet on this pillar of the truth of God :
There, Justice wields heaven's sin-avenging rod—
There, Mercy bleeds for man's stupendous crime :
O, glorious Cross ! when shall this truth sublime—
That He who died upon that altar lives
Above, and prays for man : that power he gives
To all who pray through him that they may climb,
O glorious Cross ! up towards the Father's throne—
O, when shall this high truth to every heart
Grace, joy, salvation, Christian life impart,
And all mankind seek bliss in that alone ?
O, glorious Cross ! Faith trusts the day to see,
When Hope shall turn all eyes, Love draw all hearts
to thee."

Immortal
Christ, I pray
To thee:
Oh, say
To me,
Sweet Jesus, that thou wilt abode take up
With me when I have cleansed my sinful heart;
And when I taste thy sacramental cup
Still whisper that thou never wilt depart.
Oh Lord,
I kneel
Thy word
To feel;
My grief
Doth see
Relief
In Thee,
And while
I weep,
Thy smile
Doth keep
My soul in cheer.
And falling here,
God's heaven is near.

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